DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 208 SP 040 009

AUTHOR Sudzina, Mary R.
TITLE "Psyching Out" the "Praxis II Tests of Learning and Teaching": What Our Students Need To Know.
PUB DATE 2001-04-14
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Psychology; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Knowledge Base for Teaching; Preservice Teacher Education; *Teacher Certification; Teacher Competencies
IDENTIFIERS *Praxis Series; Teacher Knowledge

ABSTRACT

The introduction of the "Praxis" tests to certify preservice teachers has added to the controversy over what content should be taught in educational psychology classes. "Praxis II" tests are essentially exit examinations, usually taken between the junior and senior year to ensure that students know their specialty content areas and/or appropriate pedagogy for teaching before becoming certified. "Praxis II" tests of "Principles of Learning and Teaching" (ETS, 1999) encompass the content that students are expected to know in areas that have traditionally been educational psychology. Tests are geared toward specific age groups. Topics cover four broad categories (organizing content knowledge for student learning; creating an environment for student learning; teaching for student learning; and teacher professionalism). These assessments use a case study approach to measure students' general pedagogical knowledge. The author suggests that the "Principles of Learning and Teaching: Grades 7-12 "may be very difficult for typical undergraduates due to lack of experience. She notes that it is important to share with student teachers what kinds of information are emphasized on the test. She also recommends that students be exposed to the case study method before taking the test. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 453 208

"Psyching Out" the *Praxis II Tests of Learning and Teaching*: What Our Students Need to Know

Mary R. Sudzina, Ph.D.
Professor of Educational Psychology
The University of Dayton
Dayton, Ohio 45469-0525
sudzina@udayton.edu

Roundtable presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
Seattle, Washington
April 14, 2001

SP040009

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M.R. Sudzina
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"Psyching Out" the *Praxis II Tests of Learning and Teaching*: What Our Students Need to Know

Mary R. Sudzina
The University of Dayton

For at least the last dozen years, the educational psychology community has vigorously debated what content that should be taught in educational psychology classes. Position papers have been published (Anderson, et. al., 1995) and presented (Eggen & Kauchek, 1995), questionnaires have gone out from publishers to solicit hot topics, educational psychology textbooks have been analyzed and compared for content, debates have taken place at professional meeting on this subject, and national and state standards have been revised to include more subject matter content and less "traditional" educational psychology content such as human development and learning theory.

At the same time, the teaching of educational psychology has come under siege. Until recently, it was not unusual to hear individuals remark that they remembered their educational psychology classes in college as something totally foreign to them; the professor lectured about theory and research but they weren't *really* supposed to understand it all. Educational psychology, however interesting, seemed to have little connection to their real lives. Part of the charm of taking educational psychology was that is appeared so esoteric.

The climate has definitely changed. As educational psychologists are struggling to justify the worth of their courses, they are also expected to be role models for the understanding and application of educational psychology content to teaching and learning (see, Marchant, 1995). In essence, they are expected to be exemplary teachers with a wide repertoire of teaching strategies and practical applications. This includes the use of the case study method and distance learning technology (see, Sudzina, 2000). Educational psychologists are no viewed as ivory tower dwellers, but have been thrust into the forefront as *the* experts on learning and teaching principles *and* applications.

Praxis Tests and Teacher Certification

The introduction of the *Praxis* tests by the Educational Testing Service to certify preservice teachers has added fuel to these ongoing issues. Prospective teachers enrolled in a teacher certification program in an accredited institution are required to pass several levels of testing in order to be certified as a teacher. *Praxis I* is a preliminary screening of basic skills, usually taken before the sophomore year in an undergraduate program or before being formally admitted in the teacher certification program.

Praxis II tests are essentially exit exams, usually taken between the junior and senior year to ensure that students know their specialty content areas and/or appropriate pedagogy for teaching before receiving their preliminary teaching certificate. *Praxis III* tests are classroom performance assessments used to evaluate all aspects of a beginning teacher's classroom performance. They will typically be administered during the first year of teaching and are designed to assist in licensure decisions.

It appears that the debate about what is important to teach in educational psychology has now been shifted from the professional community to the accreditation

community. This may not have been an issue if some of the states had not decided to issue report cards on the quality of teacher preparation programs based on the percentage of students who pass these various tests. If our students do not pass the tests in our domain, we will be held accountable! It is in our best interests, and those of our students, to discover what this test is all about.

Principles of Learning and Teaching Test

The *Praxis II* tests of *Principles of Learning and Teaching* (ETS, 1999) encompass the content that students are expected to know in areas that have traditionally been educational psychology. The tests are geared to specific age group: elementary (grades K-6), middle (grades 5-9), or secondary (grades 7-12) students. Topics covered include four broad categories: organizing content knowledge for student learning; creating an environment for student learning; teaching for student learning; and, teacher professionalism.

These assessments use a case study approach to measure students' general pedagogical knowledge. The test takes 2 hours, and consists of 45 multiple-choice questions and 6 constructed-response questions. Three case histories are presented, each followed by 7 multiple-choice questions and 2 constructed-response questions; 24 additional discrete multiple-choice questions are included. Students are advised to plan on approximately 30-35 minutes per case history and 25 minutes for the additional multiple-choice questions.

What Our Students Need To Know

One of the difficulties educational psychologist struggle with annually is what their students need to know and how best to teach it. Educational psychology texts have become more and more comprehensive and are now accompanied with excellent – and exhaustive – ancillaries including test banks, overheads, videos, websites, and CD-ROMs. It then becomes a personal decision what to leave in and what to leave out. It is simply impossible to teach an entire educational text in one semester, which seems to be the typical amount of time allotted in teacher preparation programs for educational psychology. How do we decide what to teach?

The educational psychologists that I have had the privilege of working with and talking to over the past dozen years at local, regional, and national professional meetings are very aware of recent trends and advances in the research, pedagogy, and applications, of learning and teaching principles. They have been constantly striving to improve their practice and their students' understanding of the value of educational psychology for learning (see, Griffin & Cohen, 2000). However, this may not be the norm in the teaching educational psychology. Clearly, the Educational Testing Service has decided what our students need to know. I decided to take the *Praxis II* test to discover what students were expected to know to pass this test.

This author took the *Principles of Learning and Teaching: Grades 7-12* on June 24, 2000. She answered all the questions within the suggested time limits with little time to spare. In her opinion, it would be very difficult for the typical undergraduate student to complete the case history questions and constructed response questions if they have

not been exposed to the case study method or problem-based learning. Additionally, the written constructed response section asks students' to compare the plusses and minuses of different strategies (i.e., pedagogy, behavior management, motivation, assessment, class rules) and back up their responses with appropriate documentation or research. This would be very challenging for students who have not had the opportunity to synthesize several different points of view, issues, research findings, actions, and consequences.

Content covered included:

- Cooperative learning
- Legal issues/cases
- Piaget (the only theorist covered)
- Behavior management/class rules
- Standardized testing/ norm and criterion referenced
- Process approaches to learning
- Special needs – appropriate teacher behaviors both instructionally and emotionally
- Appropriate use of warmth and humor
- Modeling problem-solving strategies
- Pedagogical differences between teaching good and poor students (reading)

Recommendations

This proposal was not intended to be an exhaustive list of everything on the test but a sampling of the kinds of issues and content that appeared in the *Praxis II* case studies and questions. However, perhaps these topics can help guide our content decisions for our courses and assist our students in preparing and "psyching out" the test. I am *not* advocating teaching to the test. Rather, if we know that these kinds of information are emphasized, share that information with our students.

My other recommendation would be that our students be exposed to the case study method. There are several excellent casebooks both on how to teach with cases (see, Sudzina, 1999; Wassermann, 1994), as well as provide a selection of cases to apply to educational psychology (see, Kauffman, et. al., 1998; Kowalski, Henson, & Weaver, 1994; and Silverman, Welty, & Lyon, 1992). The three most popular educational psychology texts currently used in the field also include case study applications (see, Eggen & Kauchek, 2000; Ormrod, 1999; and Woolfolk, 1998).

References

Anderson, L., Blumenfeld, P., Pintrich, P., Clark, C., Marx, R., & Peterson, P. (1995). Educational psychology for teachers: Reforming our courses, rethinking our roles. *Educational Psychology*, 30(3), 143-157.

Educational Testing Service. (1999). *Principles of Learning and Teaching test bulletin.* Princeton, NJ: ETS.

Eggen, P., & Kauchek, D. (April, 1995). *The teaching of educational psychology: A research agenda.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American educational Research Association, San Francisco.

Eggen, P., & Kauchek, D. (2000). *Educational psychology (4th ed.).* New York: Merrill/Macmillan.

Griffin, M., & Cohen, M. (April, 2000). *Teaching educational psychology: Strategies for learning.* Interactive symposium presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Kauffman, J., Hallahan, D., Mostert, M., & Trent, S. (1998). *Managing classroom behavior: A Reflective case-based approach (2nd ed.).* New York: Allyn &Bacon.

Kowalski, T., Weaver, R., & Henson, K. (1994). *Case studies of beginning teachers.* New York: Longman

Marchant, G. (April, 1995). *Teaching educational psychology for understanding.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.

Ormrod, J. (1999). *Educational psychology (3rd ed.).* New York: Merrill/Macmillian
Silverman, R., Welty, W., & Lyon, S. (1992). *Case studies for teacher problem solving.* NY: McGraw-Hill.

Sudzina, M. (Ed.) (1999). *Case study applications for teacher education: Cases of teaching and learning in the content areas.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Sudzina, M. (April, 2000). *Teaching with cases in educational psychology: Why they're not going away.* Interactive symposium presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Wassermann, S. (1994). *Introduction to case method teaching: A guide to the galaxy.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Woolfolk, A. (1998). *Educational psychology (7th ed.).* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.